



# *Vedanta in the West*

**R. K. Dasgupta**

[Kamala Lecture for 2002,  
The University of Calcutta]



*Published by :*

Anjan Kr. Dan  
Estates & Trust Officer  
SENATE HOUSE  
University of Calcutta  
87/1, College Street  
Kolkata - 700 073

*Price : Rs. 100/-*

BCU 4110  
GS5742

*Printed by :*

Imperial Enterprise  
36, Surya Sen Street  
Kolkata - 700 009



## CONTENTS

*Preface* / 5

**Vedanta in the West** / 7

**European Response to Vedanta** / 17

**American Response to Vedanta** / 32

**Ramakrishna Movement and Vedanta in the West** / 40

**Swami Vivekananda and Vedanta in the West** / 51



## P R E F A C E

*Vedanta in the West*

I thank the University of Calcutta for its very kindly appointing me its Kamala lecturer for the year 2002, although I know, I do not deserve this singular honour. When the appointment came to me in April last year, I hesitated to accept it knowing that amongst the persons who delivered these lectures were Sarojini Naidu, Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, Rabindranath Tagore and Suniti Kumar Chatterji. But I accepted the invitation in the belief that not to do so would be an act of discourtesy to the University where I was taught in the late thirties of the last century and where I had the privilege of teaching for about ten years.

While I did not have the privilege of knowing Srimati Kamala Mookerjee, I feel being close to the Mookerjee family as one who knew her three brothers, Rama Prasad Mookerjee, Shyama Prasad and Uma Prasad and the eldest of them was my teacher in the Department of English, Calcutta University. His son, Justice Chittatosh Mookerjee sat in my class when I was an officiating Professor of English at Presidency College in 1945.

Born on 18 April 1895, Kamala had the best of education and her fine intelligence and gentle manners made her very dear to her father Sir Asutosh and all who knew her. When she passed away at the young age of twenty-seven on 4 January 1923, Sir Asutosh and the family was thrown into an inconsolable grief. Sir Asutosh instituted a lectureship in 1924 to perpetuate her memory. I offer my profound respect to her memory while delivering these lectures.





## *Vedanta in the West*

I think, I owe you an apology for choosing a subject like 'Vedanta in the West' for my Kamala Lectures for the year. Vedanta has certainly entered into our spiritual bloodstream. Should we not see how our philosophy has touched the soul of the western world? We know, there are some western Vedantists. Let us consider the approach of Max Müller (1823-1900). In his *Three Lectures on the Vedanta Philosophy* (1894), Max Müller says: 'What distinguishes the Vedanta philosophy from all other philosophies is that it is at the same time a religion and a philosophy.' He adds in the same work: 'It is the most sublime philosophy and the most satisfying religion.' (*Ibid.*, p. 29.) I will come back to Max Müller at the appropriate place in these lectures.

I may make a confession before going into the subject. I do not agree with those who think that Western response to Indian philosophy is a part of Western Orientalism which presents a distorted view of our culture. This is not at all true. The most influential expert of this school of thought was Edward Said, a professor at Columbia University who made a name for himself as a writer on Western response to the East. The substance of his most important work entitled *Orientalism* (1978) may be put in his own words from his introduction to this book: 'Orientalism is a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having an authority over the Orient. It tries to show that European culture gained in strength and identity by setting itself against the Orient





as a sort of surrogate and even underground self.' (Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 1978, p. 3.) I do not at all think that serious Indology in the West has emerged out of a sense of superiority in the Western mind. Let us consider one of the Orientalists like Sir William Jones (1746-94) who founded the Asiatic Society in Calcutta in 1784. He presents India possessing a superior civilization. He exalted Sanskrit above Greek and Latin. In his third anniversary address delivered at the Asiatic Society on 2 February 1786, Sir William Jones said: 'The Sanskrit language, whatever be its antiquity, is of a wonderful structure; more perfect than the Greek, more copious than the Latin, and more exquisitely refined than either.' (Quoted in Garland Cannon, *Oriental Jones*, 1964, p. 141.)

Let me begin with a few words on the word Vedanta, the word and its meaning. Vedanta is a compound word consisting of the word *Veda* and the word *anta*. The Sanskrit word *Veda* means knowledge, particularly sacred knowledge. The word *Veda* is derived from the root verb *vid* which means to know, to discover, to meet or acquire. The most ancient sacred book of India is called *Rgveda*, the prefix *rk* meaning a verse in a hymn which is called *sūkta*.

Vedanta, meaning the end of the Vedas, that is, the *Rgveda* and the three other Vedas, means the completion of the Vedas or their fulfilment. Before dealing with our subject for these lectures which is Vedanta in the West, let me say a few words about the corpus of Vedantic literature. The canonical texts of Vedanta are the *Upanishads*. Etymologically the word *upanishad* has in it three elements, *upa* meaning near, *ni* meaning devotedly and *sad* meaning sitting. It is assumed that the word means instruction imparted to one sitting with devotion at the feet of his preceptor. There are some two hundred *Upanishads*, but not all of them are really old. Only





about twelve or thirteen *Upanishads* belong to the period following the age of the Vedas. In the Indian philosophical tradition, the *Upanishads* are called *Śruti*, that is, what is heard. This means that the *Upanishads* are not written by any human being, or *purusha*, and that is why the *Upanishads* are called *apaurusheya*. They are divine words heard and recorded by our sages. For this reason *Upanishads* are revelations. Vedantic philosophy is the Upanishadic philosophy. But the corpus of what is generally called Vedantic literature is much larger than this. The commentaries on a basic work like *Vedāntasūtra* or *Brahmasūtra* of Badarayana were written around the second century B.C.! It was written by Badarayana because he thought that the *Upanishads* presented by different sages at different times between the eighth and the sixth century B.C. present a large variety of philosophical doctrines. Badarayana took upon himself the task of presenting an orderly view of the vast corpus of the Upanishadic literature as a consistent philosophy. But his *Vedāntasūtra* is extremely aphoristic in style which needed a lucid interpretation. The vast commentary literature on the *Vedāntasūtra* produced in the Middle Ages in Sanskrit between the eighth and the seventeenth century is also a part of what we call Vedantic literature. I am not, however, including in this corpus the writings on Vedanta by scholars in India and abroad in their languages.

Before I begin my account of Vedanta in the West, I think, I should say something about the present situation of Vedantic studies in Western Universities. It is an important enquiry if only because the philosophic establishments in Europe and America and Australia can exist only in the university systems of the three continents. And we must say that Vedanta or Indian philosophy has no presence in





that establishment, although the response of some Western scholars and philosophers is indeed very striking. I was a student at the University of Oxford in the fifties of the last century and I saw that Vedanta had no presence in the academic work in that University. But the Sanskrit Chair in that University was more than hundred and twenty years old and the first two incumbents of that Chair, Horace Hayman Wilson and Monier Monier-Williams, were great Vedantic scholars. There is no space for Vedanta or Indian philosophy at the undergraduate level in that University. When I was up at Oxford, T.E. Burrow was the Boden Professor of Sanskrit and he was interested only in Sanskrit grammar. The Spalding Chair of Eastern Religion and Ethics was created in 1936 and its first incumbent Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan had no courses to teach. R.C. Zaehner held the Chair in my time and he would give public lectures on Indian philosophy, his audience would not consist of more than one or two. In Burrow's Sanskrit class there was then only one student. The situation was the same at Cambridge. Even in the London School of Oriental and African Studies there is no degree course in philosophy including Indian philosophy. I taught in some universities in the USA and Canada for about three years and I did not find there any teacher or student of Vedanta or Indian philosophy in general. But one could study oriental philosophy for a doctoral degree in some universities of the West. On the whole by philosophy Western universities mean European philosophy.

I think, while speaking on Vedanta in the West, it is important that we see the causes responsible for the indifference of the academic establishment in the West to Indian philosophy. That establishment does not share the views on Indian thought of Schopenhauer, Deussen, Max Müller and





Rolland. As an undergraduate student of Philosophy in Calcutta, I did a three-paper Pass course in Philosophy and read Frank Thilly's *A History of Philosophy* (1916) and discovered that the academic philosopher in the West had no knowledge of what Schopenhauer, Deussen and Max Müller said about Indian philosophy. Thilly says in his book that '... the theories of Oriental peoples, the Hindus, Egyptian and Chinese, consist in the main, of mythological and ethical, and are rarely complete systems of thought; they are pervaded with poetry and faith.' (Frank Thilly, *A History of Philosophy*, 1916, 3rd ed., 1956, p. 7.) This continues to be the view of a European philosopher even in our day, we can see in Sir Alfred J. Ayer's autobiography *More of My Life* (1984). In this work Sir Ayer, one of the foremost of twentieth century British philosophers, says, 'It appears that there were interesting Indian schools of logic which petered out by about the ninth century A.D. to be replaced by arcane varieties of metaphysics.' (Pp. 97-98.)

But this kind of apartheid in the intellectual life of the West is not really the reason for the Western philosophers' antipathy towards our philosophers. Today philosophy is dead in the West. Its death warrant was first pronounced by G.E. Moore (1873-1958), the eminent Cambridge philosopher, in his article 'Refutation of Idealism' published in *Mind* in 1903 and later included in his *Philosophical Studies* published in 1922. Then came Logical Positivism and its heir Linguistic Philosophy which between them performed the euthanasia of Western philosophy. The process, of course began in the eighteenth century with David Hume's sceptical empiricism which made 'how we know' more important than what actually 'we should know' and thus introduced in Western philosophy what Irving Babbitt calls 'a long debate of epistemology'. (Irving Babbitt, 'Buddha and the Occident' in his edition





of the *Dhammapada*, 1936, p. 85.) I have already told you how Max Müller thought David Hume unsettled European thought. This euthanasia of philosophy in the West has been effected noiselessly. But even Bertrand Russell, in a sense, one of the creators of modern philosophy, has regretted what actually happened in the philosophical scene. In his *My Philosophical Development* (1959) he says: 'The new philosophy seems to me to have abandoned, without necessity, that grave and important task which philosophy throughout the ages has hitherto pursued. Philosophers from Thales onwards have tried to understand the world. I cannot feel that the new philosophy is carrying on this tradition.' (Bertrand Russell, *My Philosophical Development*, 1959, p. 230.) When I think of the big names in Logical Positivism and Linguistic Philosophy, some of whom I saw from a distance while a student at Oxford in the mid-fifties of the last century, I seem to see before my eyes, the pall bearers moving along without a tear for what they have destroyed. I did not know of a single philosopher to pull up the adventurous thinkers from the mire. Even Russell failed to take up the guardianship of the flock. For he was himself an unsteady thinker changing his ideas as many times as he married. One of his admirers, Alan Wood, has quoted a confession of Russell, I do not know its source, which says what I wish to say at the end of this lecture. Wood says that Russell once remarked: 'I have been painfully forced to the belief that nine-tenth of what is regarded as philosophy today is humbug. The only part that is at all definite is logic, and since it is logic, it is not philosophy.' (Alan Wood, *The Passionate Sceptic*, 1957; London, 1963, p. 200.)

And this is the substance of the two books I have read which reject Linguistic Philosophy. The first of these two





books is Ernest Gellner's *Words and Things* published in 1959. Russell gives a foreword to this book saying that 'Linguistic philosophy still flourishes because the power of fashion is great.' Gellner himself says that 'Linguistic Philosophy can conceive of its own activities as the euthanasia of philosophy.' (Ernest Gellner, *Words and Things*, 1959; Pelican 1968, p. 20.)

The other book is Bryan Magee's *Confessions of a Philosopher: A Journey through Western Philosophy* published in 1997. Its author says, 'Oxford philosophy renounced philosophy's traditional task of understanding the world.' (*Confessions of a Philosopher*, 1977, p. 69.) Later in the book Magee says, 'I regard this attitude as a rejection of philosophy and I reject it in turn.' (*Ibid.*, p. 114.) If in the new century and new millennium philosophy is reborn and brings back the ideas of Parmenides, Plato, Plotinus and Spinoza, the Vedanta as Max Müller presented it, will be an integral part of that philosophy.

That Max Müller desired a kind of Vedantic renaissance in world philosophy should be evident from all that he says about the Vedanta philosophy in his writings. I think, it is particularly evident from two of his statements; one about Ramakrishna and the other about Vivekananda. About Ramakrishna in a letter to Vivekananda: 'As for your beloved man I worship him with my whole heart. To think of him makes my eyes fill with tears of gladness that I was permitted to hear of him. His sayings published in the *Brahmavādin* are my greatest delight. How wonderful that his teachings should have been bourn to this far-off land where we had never even known of his existence. If I might only have known while he was yet with us. My greatest desire is to one day visit the spot which was sanctified by his presence,





while he lived, and I may be so fortunate as to fulfil the wish.' (Max Müller's letter to Vivekananda reproduced in Louise Burke, *Swami Vivekananda in the West*, iv, 1986, pp. 170-71.)

Obviously this enthusiasm for Ramakrishna is a part of Max Müller's love of Vedanta. He looked upon Ramakrishna as Vedanta incarnate. The other statement of Max Müller shows his enthusiasm for Vedanta and is expressive of his desire that its message should be broadcast throughout the world. In a letter to Vivekananda dated 2 April 1896 he says: 'I hope you will continue your work in America and make both Sankara and Ramanuja widely known.' (*Ibid.*, p. 170.) Max Müller found in the teachings of Ramakrishna a synthesis of the *Advaitavad* of Sankara and *Visishtadvaitavad* of Ramanuja. I think it is for this that Max Müller's view of Vedanta and Ramakrishna and Vivekananda's interpretations of it are not mentioned in Nirad C. Chaudhuri's biography of Max Müller or in his work on Hinduism and I think it is dangerous to read these books for an understanding of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda's Vedanta.

While speaking to you about Max Müller's exaltation of the Vedanta above all other religions, I must also tell you something about Max Müller's devotion to Christianity. And I face a problem in doing it. It is due to the fact that Max Müller desired that Indians embrace Christianity. It may seem that there are two Max Müllers, one exalting the Vedanta and the other exalting Christianity. And our problem is how to establish that Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde are essentially the same person. Let me first tell you about his ideas about a Christian India. It is a subject which is not mentioned in the works of Max Müller. It is not also mentioned by Max Müller himself in his books. And the





correspondence with Pratap Chandra Mozoomdar, the head of Keshab Chandra Sen's Bharatvarshiya Brahmo Samaj, which is included in S.C. Bose's biography of Pratap Chandra Mozoomdar, makes it clear that Max Müller was very keen to see Christianity firmly established in India. Let us remember that Max Müller had very little knowledge of the Sadharan Brahmo Samaj which was established in Calcutta in 1878 as a Brahmo sect to be distinguished from the Brahmo community which succeeded from the Brahmo Samaj of which Debendranath Tagore was the leader. The Sadharan Brahmo Samaj had as its members the distinguished Brahmos of Calcutta like Rajnarain Bose and Sivanath Shastri and it was much larger than the sect founded by Keshab Chandra Sen who was known to Max Müller, who wrote a long Biographical essay on Keshab in 1884, the year of Kesab's death. It is included in Max Müller's *Biographical Essays*. We must admit that there was a time when Max Müller conceived of a Christian India. In a letter to Bunsen dated 25 August 1856 Max Müller said: 'India is much riper for Christianity than Kimev and Greece was at the time of St. Paul. The rotten tree has for some time had artificial support, because its fall would have been inconvenient for the Government. I should like to live for ten years and learn the language, try to make friends and then see whether I was fit to take part in a work, by means of which the old mischief of the Indian priest-craft could be overthrown and the way open for the entrance of simple Christian teaching, that entrance which his teaching finds in every human heart, which is freed from the ensnaring powers of priests and from the obscuring influence of philosophers.'

A more revealing statement of his views regarding the prospect of Christianity in India is his long letter to Pratap





Chandra written in 1899 which is included in his biography and reprinted in S.C. Bose's *Life of Pratap Chunder Mozoomdar*. From what he says in this letter, it appears that his views were fundamentally different from those of a Christian missionary. One must admit that his words are still offensive to Hindu ears and I further admit that the whole letter is essentially unsound. But still I shall say a few words in his defence, not in defence of his argument but in defence of his honesty. Let us first recall the most important words in this letter. I am quoting two excerpts:

If you accept, as there is recorded, you are a Christian, there is no necessity for your being formally received into the membership of one or the other sect of the Christian church whether reformed or unreformed.

And then towards the end of the letter he says:

I do not hesitate to say that on some of these points we may have to learn from you more than what we can teach you, and I say this honestly and from personal experience. That too will be a lesson difficult to learn for our bishops and missionaries, but in Christian humility they will have to learn it. From my point of view, India, at least the best part of it is already converted to it.

Now this must sound very strange indeed.





## *European Response to Vedanta*

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860)

‘Oupnek’hat is the most elevating reading possible in the world. It has been the consolation of my life and will be the solace of my death.’  
– Schopenhauer.

Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) is known more for his magnificent prose than for his metaphysics. His greatest work, *The World as Will and Idea* (published in two volumes in 1818 and 1844) is available in E.F.J. Payne’s English translation (1969). The most readable work on his life and ideas is C. Janaway’s *Schopenhauer* published by the Oxford University Press in 1994. His philosophy is known as a philosophy of Will which presents man as a willing being. Since the human Will does not bring happiness, he is a pessimist. It is therefore not possible to present him as a Vedantist although he was so enthusiastic about the *Upanishads* which he read in Anquetil Duperron’s Latin translation of *Fifty Upanishads* (1801-02) translated into Persian by Sanskrit pundits brought from Benares in 1656-57 by Emperor Shahjahan’s son Dara Shukoh. Schopenhauer’s text therefore was not very reliable. But he was certainly inspired by the Latin version of Duperron although it is not possible to establish a Upanishadic influence on his philosophy of Will. Swami Vivekananda quoted Schopenhauer’s words on the *Upanishads* in a public address he gave in Colombo on 15 January 1897.





Vivekananda also quoted Schopenhauer's prophecy that '... the world is about to see a revolution in thought more extensive and powerful than that which was witnessed by the Renaissance of Greek Literature', and Vivekananda, seeing the response to his lectures on Indian philosophy thought that '... today his predictions are coming to pass.' Vivekananda, however, did not accept Schopenhauer's philosophy of Will because he thought it not a Vedantic idea. But we must acknowledge Schopenhauer as the first European philosopher who spoke with great enthusiasm about the philosophy of the *Upanishads*.

In his preface to his *World as Will and Idea*, he says that an acquaintance with Indian thought would be an advantage to the students of his philosophy. Since this part of the preface is so important for an understanding of Schopenhauer's appreciation, I am placing before you the whole passage.

If my reader is a partaker of the benefit conferred by the Vedas, the access to which opened to us through the *Upanishads*, is in my eyes the greatest advantage which this still young century enjoys over previous ones, because I believe that the influence of the Sanskrit literature will penetrate not less deeply than did the revival of Greek literature in the fifteenth century. If, I say, the reader has also already received and assimilated the sacred primitive Indian wisdom, then is he the best of all prepared to hear what I have to say to him.

Schopenhauer was so impressed by what he understood of Indian philosophy that he said that the Christian idea of missionary work in India was absurd. 'The ancient wisdom of the human race', he said, 'will not be replaced by what





happened in Galilee. On the contrary, Indian philosophy streams back to Europe, and will produce a fundamental change in our knowledge and thought.'

Now our question is why did not the great enthusiasm of Schopenhauer influence the European mind of the nineteenth century and why it did not actually create in the West a Vedantic renaissance as he contemplated it? Schopenhauer was later attracted by Buddhism and he failed to integrate as Swami Vivekananda could say in one of his addresses at the Parliament of Religions at Chicago in 1893 that Buddhism was the fulfilment of Hinduism.

Helmuth von Glasenapp wrote a very interesting book on German response to Indian philosophy and happily we can read it in S. Ambike's English translation of it published from New Delhi as *Image of India* in 1973. In this work Glasenapp says: 'Schopenhauer's conception of the musical thought of the Indians and his views on Vedanta and Buddhism have now become obsolete in many respects and offer certainly an interesting but by no means a faithful picture of the actual conditions.' (Helmuth von Glasenapp, S. Ambike tr., 1973, p. 90.) What is obsolete now was vague in Schopenhauer's time. What is even more important for us to see is the fact that India has no presence in the eighteenth century European Enlightenment. While it is true that Voltaire said that '... everything came to us from the Ganges' and even regretted that '... our nations have mutually destroyed each other on that very soil where we went to collect nothing but money, and where the first Greeks travelled for nothing but knowledge' and Goethe composed his ecstatic quatrain on Kalidasa's *Sakuntala*, eighteenth century Europe as a whole had no significant response to Indian thought. In 1931 the distinguished German intellectual Ernst Cassirer wrote a large book called





*The Philosophy of the Enlightenment.* In Pettegrove's 366-page English version of the work published in 1951 there is not a bare mention of India. Sir William Jones founded the Asiatic Society in Calcutta in 1784 and his English version of the *Īśa Upanishad* was published in 1799, the first translation of any *Upanishad* into any language of Europe. But it did not create any interest in the English-speaking world.

Perhaps Schopenhauer's profound appreciation of the *Upanishads* was supplanted by the very adverse observations of Hegel (1771-1831) who was obviously a more influential thinker in Germany than any other philosopher of the age. Hegel's absurd view of Indian philosophy is indeed one of the strange things in the history of Western response to Indian thought. Glasenapp's comment on this deserves notice. He says in his *Image of India* that 'It is difficult to explain this animosity of Hegel which is little worthy of a philosopher.' (*Ibid.*, p. 52.)

Unfortunately Hegel's denunciation of Indian philosophy still influences some Western writers on Vedanta, particularly those who think that Vedantism is nothing but the severe monism of Sankaracharya's Advaita. An example of this mistaken view of Vedanta philosophy is Albert Schweitzer who says in his *Indian Thought and its Development* that 'Indian thought in its very nature is so entirely different from our own because of the great part which the idea of what is called world and life negation plays in it.' (Albert Schweitzer, *Indian Thought and its Development*, Mrs. C.E.B. Russell tr., 1936, p. 1.)

But, if at all there could be Vedantic renaissance in Europe, I think it would have begun in Germany. Germany more than England and France produced scholars in Sanskrit and Indian philosophy who made an outstanding contribution

BCU 4110





to what was called Indology. The Asiatic Society of Bengal had very fine scholars like Sir William Jones, Colebrooke and Charles Wilkins but somehow they did not really bring about anything like a Vedantic renaissance in their country. Perhaps this was due to the fact that Indian philosophy did not become a part of the German interest in philosophy as such Indian studies were yet to become a part of the academic establishment anywhere in Europe. But those who studied our philosophy had a very genuine interest in our philosophy and developed a profound love for it. J.G. Herder (1744-1803) in one of his books says: 'The Indian places his bliss in passionless tranquillity, in an indestructible enjoyment of serenity and joy.' (Glasenapp, *Image of India*, 1973, p. 13.) About F.W.J. Schelling (1775-1854) Max Müller says: 'Schelling was a great admirer of literature, and it was particularly the Upanishads which completely charmed him.' (*Ibid.*, p. 29.) Paul Deussen (1845-1919), is one of the foremost Vedantic scholars of the world. We can read the whole history of German interest in Indian philosophy in Walter Leifer's 350-page work, *India and the Germans: 100 Years of Indo-German Contacts* published in 1971.

### Paul Deussen (1845-1919)

Paul Deussen is particularly important in our survey because of his being a valued acquaintance of Swami Vivekananda who wrote an article on him to express his profound respect for his understanding of Vedanta philosophy. Deussen studied Sanskrit under Lassen (1800-76) at Marburg University for his doctoral degree and while teaching the language at Geneva resolved to devote his life to the study of Indian philosophy. When Vivekananda met him on 9 September 1896 where





he was a professor of Philosophy he had made a name as an Indologist for his German translation of Badarayana's *Brahmasūtra* with Sankara's commentary which was published in 1887. In his work on German Indology, Helmuth von Glasenapp says about Deussen that '... he was the great pioneer who, like no other man in his time, contributed towards securing for Indian philosophy its due place in the entire field of philosophy.' Max Müller looked upon Deussen as his heir and successor and told him in a letter: '... when I am gone a heavy burden will fall on your shoulders.'

Vivekananda was profoundly impressed by Deussen's understanding of Vedanta philosophy. What particularly struck him is that he was a brave exponent of Vedantism who felt free to express his opinion on it without caring for any adverse criticism from any side, 'Deussen is certainly the freest amongst scholars in the expression of his opinion of Vedanta.' Vivekananda called Deussen 'a roaring Advaitaist' because he was a monist in philosophy, a believer in the doctrine of the One without a second. There is an excellent account of Vivekananda's meeting with Deussen in Swami Vidyatamananda's article 'Vivekananda in Germany and Holland' published in *Prabuddha Bharata* of March 1975. Marie Louise Burke deals with this subject in the fourth volume of her *Swami Vivekananda in the West*. I cannot say if Vivekananda read any work of Deussen in English translation. I think no translation was available during the six years between 1896 when he met the German scholar and 1902, the year he left the world. The work of Deussen we read today in English is *The Philosophy of the Upanishads* translated by the Rev. A.S. Geden and published in 1905. Obviously when Vivekananda discussed Vedanta with his German host he told him about the substance of this work. In this work





Deussen seizes the essence of the Upanishadic philosophy when he says that 'The *Atman* is the soul reality (*Satyam, Satyasya Satyam*), for it is the metaphysical unity which is manifest in all empirical plurality.'

Before going into Deussen's response to Vedanta let me draw your attention to two of his papers written in English and published in India. Deussen visited India in 1893 and gave an address on 'The Philosophy of Vedanta' at the Bombay branch of the Royal Asiatic Society in February that year. The address was published in the *Indian Antiquary* in 1902. This paper along with another was published by Susil Gupta India Ltd. in 1957. In his paper 'The Philosophy of Vedanta' Deussen says something which distinguishes him from Schopenhauer who lays stress on the uniqueness of Vedanta. On the contrary, Deussen affirms that 'Indian philosophy is and will be the only possible parallel to what so far the Europeans have considered as', Deussen adds, 'through all the centuries of its development it has taken its course influenced by West-Asiatic and European thought and precisely for this reason the comparison of European philosophy with that of the Indians is of the highest interest.' (P. 1.)

Latter in this essay Deussen says that the 'Upanishadic doctrine with its bold idealism is comparable to that of Parmenides.' (P. 12.) It would be highly immodest on my part to say that Parmenidean Monism is very different from the monism of Vedanta. I do not have the time and far less the learning to present to you the essence of the philosophy of Parmenides. But as a humble student of Greek philosophy, I think, Parmenides never reaches the height of Upanishadic Monism.

Parmenides (540-470 B.C.) is a pre-Socratic philosopher belonging to Elea for which reason he is called an Eleatic





philosopher, the other Eleatics being Xenophanes, Heraclitus and Zeno. He presented his philosophy in a poem in Homeric hexameter which has survived only in parts. But there are long quotations from his poem in the writings of other philosophers. His philosophy resembles our Vedanta philosophy, particularly of the Advaita school for two reasons. First, according to him, the world as perceived by the senses is unreal and secondly he presented reality as one. But when you go into the details of Parmenidean philosophy you discover that there is no question of comparing his philosophy with Vedanta. In the second volume of his seven volume *History of Greek Philosophy* published in 1965, K.C. Guthrie says that 'India and Parmenides are poles apart.' (P. 53.) In Vedantic thought, as Zimmer says in his *Philosophies of India* (1951), 'Thought, the intellect itself must be transcended if true reality is to be attained. Logic is an imperfect, inadequate instrument for the final insight.' (P. 380.) What is more, Greek philosophy never reached the height of the Upanishadic doctrine of *tat tvam asi* (that art thou).

So profound was Deussen's appreciation of Indian philosophy that at one place in his essay 'Outlines of Indian Philosophy' he says: 'In India the influence of this perverted and pervasive spirit of our age has not overthrown in religion and philosophy the good tradition of the great ancient time.' (P. 21.) Like Max Müller, Deussen too thought that 'Vedanta is now as in the ancient time living in the mind and heart of every thoughtful Hindu.'

To know the essence of Deussen's response to Vedanta we can read the last chapter of his work *The Philosophy of the Upanishads* (1906), entitled 'Retrospect of the Upanishads and Their Teaching'. Since the work is not easily available I am quoting to you some of his observations as we find





them in the second section of chapter xvii: 'In the conception of unity as it is expressed in the words of the *R̥gveda* (i. 164) *ekam sadvipra bahudhā vadanti*, the fundamental thought of the whole teaching of the Upanishads lay already hidden in germ in the *Atman* is the sole reality; for it is the unity which is manifest in all empirical plurality.' (Pp. 398, 404.)

Vivekananda wrote an article on Deussen whom he visited at Kiel and with whom he travelled from there to London. The article was first published in *Brahmavadin* in 1896 and it is included in the fourth volume of his *Complete Works*. (Pp. 272-77.)

### Friedrich Max Müller (1823-1900)

Swami Vivekananda called Max Müller a 'Vedantist of Vedantists'. (*Complete Works*, iv, p. 280.) There was however a time when Max Müller desired a Christianization of India. In my paper on him published in *East and West*, Rome, I have quoted his statements on this idea in the course of his correspondence with Pratap Chandra Mozoomdar, the successor of Keshab Chandra Sen as Head of the Bharatiya Brahma Samaj. In a letter to him Max Müller wrote: 'I do not want you to join any church or sect. I only wish you to honour the name of Christ to whom you owe the best part of your present religion.' The Oxford of Pusey and Keble must think in this line. Max Müller was then a Professor of that University and he knew that one of the reasons for his not being appointed to its Boden Chair of Sanskrit was the notion amongst the selectors that the Vedic scholar and translator of the *Upanishads* was not sufficiently Christian in his religious thought. But I have no doubt that he totally abandoned the idea of a Christian India in the





last ten years of his life when he exalted Vedanta as the finest of religions and philosophies. I am afraid, the world of scholars has not given much attention to a very important change in Max Müller's thought in the last decade of his life and it has not watched the element of evolution in that thought. In fact there is an anticipation of this change in his Cambridge lectures published as *India: What Can it Teach Us* (1882). In that work Max Müller suggests that the Western Christian mind needs to supplement itself with the philosophy of India. It implies a sense of insufficiency of the philosophical aspect of Christianity. Add to this his enthusiasm for the Vedanta as expressed in the introduction to the second volume of his translations of the *Upanishads*, published in 1884. In the introduction to the first volume published in 1879, he said that Schopenhauer exaggerated the value of these Vedantic texts. In the introduction to the second volume, he quotes the words of Schopenhauer as expressive of his own opinion. The words are : 'In the whole world there is no study so beneficial and so elevating as that of the *Upanishads*. It has been the solace of my life – it will be the solace of my death.'

To observe the evolution of Max Müller's response to Vedanta we have to read carefully the three works he wrote in the last years of his life. They are *Three Lectures on the Vedanta Philosophy* (1894), *Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings* (1898) and *Six Systems of Indian Philosophy* (1899). In the first amongst these three works, *Three Lectures on the Vedanta Philosophy*, Max Müller says: 'What distinguishes the Vedanta Philosophy from all other philosophies is that at the same time it is a religion and a philosophy.' (Pp. 11-12.) His other observation on the Vedanta in this work is, 'It is the most sublime philosophy and the most satisfying religion.' (P. 29.)





Anticipating the charge of mysticism in the Vedanta, Max Müller says in the same work, '... true mystic philosophy is as clear as summer sky, it is full of brightness and full of warmth.' (P. 171.) Let us see that here Max Müller speaks of the excellence of the Vedanta in absolute terms and does not introduce any qualifying statement to speak in favour of any other religion or any other philosophy.

In his *Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings* published just four years later, Max Müller says: 'Vedanta philosophy is the very marrow running through all his doctrines.' (Nanda Mukherjee's edition of the work, 1974, p. 52.) This is an important statement in the history of Vedanta in the West. Because this idea of Vedanta as living philosophy gave a new dimension and a new depth to the Western approach to the Upanishadic philosophy. It was Swami Vivekananda who was the first to express the idea in the United States. Then Romain Rolland placed the idea of Vedanta as the essence of Ramakrishna's religion in his biographies of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. The West now realizes the truth of Christopher's saying that 'Ramakrishna is Vedanta's greatest human exemplar.'

Finally we see that it is in his last work, *Six Systems of Indian Philosophy* published in 1899 Max Müller exalts Ramakrishna as philosopher who gave a new perspective of the philosophy of the Vedanta. In this work he says something very striking to establish the superiority of the Vedanta as a philosophy. He says: 'The fearless synthesis embodied in the simplest word, *tat tvam asi*, seems to me to be the boldest and truest synthesis in the whole history of philosophy.' (Indian ed., 1973, p. 215.) He adds that even Immanuel Kant, whose *Critique of Pure Reason* Max Müller had translated into English in 1881, could not reach this synthesis. Max Müller says this in his *Six*





*Systems of Indian Philosophy*. 'Even Kant', he says here, 'who clearly recognized the *tat* or It, that is the *Din an sich* (the thing in itself) behind the objective world, never went far enough to recognize the identity of the *tat*, the objective *Din an sich*, and the *tvam*, the *Din an sich* on the subjective side of the world. Let us remember that Max Müller became indifferent to Kantian philosophy within a few years of his translation of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. And he was as indifferent to the Neo-Kantians of the Marburg School as he was to the Tractarian Movement at Oxford. This was obviously because he was then full of Vedanta. In his long essay on Keshab Chandra Sen written in 1884 and first published in his *Biographical Essays* in the same year and later included in the second volume of the new edition of his *Chips from a German Workshop* (1895) Max Müller says that 'Kant was wrong when he showed that what we call knowledge has for its material nothing but what is supplied by the senses.' (*Biographical Essays*, 1895, p. 160.) In the fifties Max Müller accused David Hume (1711-76) of an unsettling scepticism in his essay on 'Bacon in Germany': 'The English philosophy which seemed to be so settled and positive in Bacon, ended in the most unsettled and negative scepticism in Hume.' (*Chips from a German Workshop*, iii, 1895, p. 497.) Later Max Müller realized that Kant too relied too much on sense experience. It then comes to this that Max Müller realized the inadequacy of Western philosophy. Obviously this was due to his deepening faith in the philosophy of the Vedanta.

Now the question is why Vedanta is still to establish itself in the academic philosophy of the West. I think, Max Müller's ideas on the Vedanta did not make any impression on the philosophical establishment in Europe and America because he is considered as an Orientalist or an Indologist and not as a philosopher.





Romain Rolland (1866-1944)

We may mention Romain Rolland as the most enlightened and inspired exponent of Vedanta in the West. His Latin mind gave him a sense order and a care for discipline in his discourse. Add to this what we may call his Gallic genius which gave his very fine sensibility as we discover in his response to our philosophy. A French Roman Catholic, he had none of the Christian sectarian prejudice in his approach to Indian philosophy. Actually he did not at all think that Indian culture was something foreign to his nature. He was a genuine European who could embrace the world-mind without renouncing the culture to which he was born. He found in Vedanta something universal which touched his universal mind. He responded so spontaneously to Indian thought that he sometimes seemed to believe that in a former life he was an Aryan of Indian origin. In a letter to Dilip Kumar Roy dated October 1924 and reproduced in Roy's book *Anāmī* he wrote: 'When I was barely twenty I had knowledge of the religions and philosophy of India. I believe therefore that there is some direct family affinity between an Aryan of the Occident and an Aryan of the Orient. And I am convinced that it was I who must have descended down the slopes of the Himalaya along with those victorious Aryans. I have their blue blood flowing in my veins.' (Quoted in Alex Aronson, *Europe Looks at India: A Study in Cultural Relations*, Bombay: Hind Kitabs, 1946, p. 181.)

Romain Rolland was born in Clemency, France, in 1866 and became a famous novelist with European reputation with the publication of his *Jean-Christophe* (1903-12, G. Cannan, tr., 1910). He was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature after the publication of his *Above the Battlefield* (tr. C.K. Ogden) in 1915. Ere long he became famous for his biographies of Beethoven (1903), Michelangelo (1908), Tolstoy (1911), Mahatma Gandhi (1924), Ramakrishna (1929) and Vivekananda





(1930). That he wrote the biographies of a German musician, an Italian artist, a Russian novelist, an Indian leader and two Indian saints show that he had a world-mind and desired a universal culture.

Although an authority on Vedanta, Rolland was not a Sanskritist. But his knowledge of Indian culture was amazing. While he was acquainted with the Upanishads, he understood the philosophy of Vedanta through the teachings of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. He corresponded with the Ramakrishna Matha in Madras, knew Mahendranath Gupta and his foot-notes to his two works, Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, show his acquaintance with the various sources of his knowledge of his subject.

As I have said, Rolland discovered Vedanta in the life and teachings of Sri Ramakrishna. And he thought, that teaching was a new message for the world, and about the authenticity of the message he had no doubt in his mind. In what he calls the 'Prelude' to the work Rolland says: 'I shall begin my story as if it were a fable. But it is an extraordinary fact that this legend, belonging apparently to the region of mythology, is in reality the account of men who were living yesterday, our neighbours in the century, and the people of today have seen them with their own eyes. I have received glowing testimonies at their hands. I have talked with some among them who were the companions of this mystic being – of the Man-Gods – and I can vouch for their loyalty. Moreover these eye-witnesses are not the simple fishermen of the Gospel story; some are great thinkers, learned in European thought and disciplined in its strict school. And yet they speak as men of three thousand years ago.' (Romain Rolland, *The Life of Ramakrishna*, 1929, E.F. Malcolm-Smith tr., 1930, Advaita Ashrama, 6th ed., 1960, p. 17. Rolland's two prefaces to his book, one entitled 'To My Eastern Readers', and the other 'To My Western Readers' are both dated 25 December





1928 and his dedication of it to his Sister Madeleine is dated January 1929; there is also an author's preface dated December 1928 and a publisher's note dated August 1929. We can legitimately take the year of publication as 1929.)

Rolland tells his Western readers that he is bringing 'to Europe, as yet unaware of it, the fruits of a new autumn, a new message of the Soul, the symphony of India bearing the name of Ramakrishna'. It can be shown – and we shall not fail to point out – that this symphony, like those of our classical masters, is built up of a hundred different musical elements emanating from the past. But the sovereign personality concentrating in himself the diveristy of these elements and fashioning them into a royal harmony, is always the one who gives his name to the work, though it contains within itself the labour of generations. And with this victorious song he marks a new era.' (*Ibid.*, p. 13.) Although Rolland presents Ramakrishna as the giver of a new message, he nevertheless affirms that this message has its roots in an ancient tradition. 'The man whose image I evoke here', he adds, 'was the consummation of two thousand years of spiritual life of three hundred million people.' (*Ibid.*, p. 13.) I say this only to say that this 'new message' is the message of Vedanta.

When we call Ramakrishna a Vedantist and he is certainly a Vedantist, we must add that he is a Vedantist according to his own understanding of Vedanta.

I have no doubt, Vedanta is loved and adored as a philosophy and even exalted above Western philosophy by some scholars and intellectuals who are not at all considered as philosophers belonging to the mainstream of philosophy in the West. Today even that mainstream of philosophy is no longer a truly philosophical stream. Many even in the West believe that philosophy is now dead in the West.





## *American Response to Vedanta*

I may now turn to the American response to Vedanta. In his *The Life of Vivekananda*, Romain Rolland speaks of 'a predisposition to Vedantism which existed in America long before the advent of Vivekananda.' (P. 62.) Obviously Romain Rolland is here referring to what is known as the Transcendental Movement in the United States led by Emerson and Thoreau who were called the Boston Brahmins. Actually Walt Whitman is also known for his profound appreciation of Indian thought and its reflection in his poetry. On the whole it appears that there is more heat, more enthusiasm in American response to our Vedanta philosophy than in the European response though the USA has not produced a Vedantic scholar like Max Müller or Deussen.

About the American Transcendental Movement it has been said that it is 'the offspring of a German father and a Hindu mother'. (Quoted in Gay Wilson Allen, *The New Walt Whitman Handbook*, 1975, p. 260.) It is only in the USA that there was composed in 1856 one whole poem entitled "Brahma" which may be looked upon as a strikingly beautiful poem on the Vedantic idea of Brahma written in any language. Since the poem is not easily available, I place before you the whole poem composed by Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-82) to make you see how profound was the influence of the Vedantic philosophy on this American writer:

If the red slayer thinks he slays,  
Or if the slain thinks he is slain,





They know not well the subtle ways  
 I keep, and pass, and turn again.  
 Far and forgot to me is near;  
 Shadow and sunlight are the same;  
 The vanished gods to me appear;  
 And one to me are shame and fame.  
 They reckon ill who leave me out;  
 When me they fly, I am the wings;  
 I am the doubter and the doubt,  
 And I the hymn the Brahmins sings.  
 The strong gods pine for my abode,  
 And pine in vain the sacred Seven;  
 But thou meek love of the good!  
 Find me, and turn thy back on heaven.

Emerson puts these words in the mouth of Brahma. You can ask me how Sankara's Brahma who is *Nirguna*, *Nirupadhi*, *Nirvisesha*, that is Advaita Vedanta's Brahma, can speak. But Emerson's Brahma is not Sankara's Brahma. He is the Brahma of our *Visishtadvaitavadi* Ramanuja's Brahma. He remains in a philosophy in which the Many is reconciled with the One, the infinite is reconciled with the Finite, in which the world is real. This is the Brahma of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda, of Rabindranath and Sri Aurobindo, this is the Vedantism of the West.

Swami Tathagatananda says that Emerson composed the poem after reading the *Upanishads* and adds that '... he was clearly influenced by the *Kaṭha Upanishad* and by the second discourse in the *Bhagavadgītā*. His poem reached the highest level of American Vedantism.' (*Journey of the Upanishads to the West*, New York: The Vedanta Society, 2002.)

Josiah Royce (1855-1916) who was a Professor of Philosophy at Harvard was a Vedantist although there is





no mention of Vedanta in the article on him in the *Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2000). (For details about his life and works we should read J. Clendenning's *The Life and Thought of Josiah Royce* (1985). His works too are not easily available in our country. We may use *The Basic Writings of Josiah Royce*, 1969, edited by J.J. McDermott.) Royce was not a Sanskritist and he had no direct acquaintance with the texts of the *Upanishads*. But his colleague Charles Rockwell Lanman who was a Professor of Sanskrit in the same University drew his attention to the *Upanishads* and their philosophy. Professor Royce makes a memorable statement on Upanishadic philosophy in the Gifford Lectures published as *World and the Individual*: 'For the writers of the *Upanishads*, this unity of being is not so much a matter of argument as it is an object of intuition.' (P. 157.) In this work Professor Royce says, 'What is, is at all events somehow one. This thought came early to the Hindu religious mind. For the sake of its illustration and defence, the thinkers of the *Upanishads* seize, at first, upon every legend, upon every popular interpretation of nature, which may serve to make this sense of the unity living in the reader's or hearer's mind. For the writers of the greater *Upanishads*, this Unity of Being is not so much a matter of argument as it is an object of intuition.' (Josiah Royce, *World and the Individual*, pp. 155-56.) In his *Spirit of Modern Philosophy* he speaks of Reality in words which are Vedantic.

How deeply Vedantic Royce was in his philosophy we can see from what he says about the Upanishadic doctrine of *tat tvam asi* (that art thou): 'Here one sees, is the Hindu way of getting at the substance. Look for the substance within, in your own nature. You will not see it without. It is the life of your own life, the soul of your own soul. Then you find





it, you will come home from the confusing world of sense-things, to the heart and essence of the world, That art Thou'. (Josiah Royce, *Spirit of Modern Philosophy*, 1899, p. 255.)

The greatest nineteenth century philosopher was obviously William James (1842-1910) and was a professor. He knew Swami Vivekananda personally and about whom he said, 'The paragon of all monistic systems is the Vedanta philosophy and the paragon of Vedantic missionaries was the late Swami Vivekananda.' He loved to hear what he called Vivekananda's monistic music. His most widely known book is *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) and he mentions Vivekananda in this work. Dr. Eugene Taylor wrote his *Swami Vivekananda and William James' Asian Psychology* at Harvard in the 1990s to show that the Indian monk who addressed the Parliament of Religions at Chicago in September 1893, cast a profound influence on William James. About this influence he says in his *Vivekananda and William James*: 'He found in Vivekananda's Yoga a form of spiritual discipline that could be used by anyone to penetrate into untapped reservoirs of energy and power for physical as well as mental tasks.' In one of the issues of the journal *American Mysticism* it is said that Vivekananda '... has exerted a lasting influence upon mystical thought in America. From his lectures and organizational work of the nineties stems the present-day Vedanta movement in the United States.' William James quotes from Vivekananda to illustrate Vedantic mysticism in his *Varieties of Religious Experience*. Since there is a good deal to read on the influence of Vedanta on American thought, I am not going further into the subject.

In his *The Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel* (1930; E.F. Malcom-Smith tr., 1931) Romain Rolland speaks of '... the predisposition to Vedantism which existed in America long before the advent of Vivekananda.' (P. 62.) The tremendous





response of the American people to Vedanta when Swami Vivekananda gave his addresses on the subject in their country on the occasion of the Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in September 1893 is recorded in Louise Burke's 6-volume *Swami Vivekananda in the West* (1983). There is also a study on 'American Response to Vedanta' in Dr. Wendell Thomas's *Hinduism Invades America* (1930). Actually the American mind turned its attention to Indian thought in general and to Vedanta in particular fairly long before the beginning of Sanskritic studies in US universities. The first American Sanskritist Edward Elbridge Salsbury (1814-1901) was appointed Professor of Sanskrit at Yale in 1841. But Sanskritic studies came of age in the United States when William Dwight Whitney (1827-94) took the Sanskrit Chair at Yale in 1854. His *Sanskrit Grammar*, still valued, was published in 1879. The first work on Vedantic philosophy produced by an American Sanskritist is *Beginning of Hindu Pantheism* (1890) by Charles Rockewell Lanman (1850-1941) who was Professor of Sanskrit at Harvard from 1903 to 1926. But American response to Vedanta was about half a century old when this work appeared. How Emerson absorbed Vedantic monism in his philosophy we can see from what he says in his journal for the thirties of the century. He says in his Journal, 'Blessed is the day when the youth discovers that Within and Above are synonymous.' (*Journals of Ralph Waldo Emerson*, iii, E.W. Emerson and W.E. Forbes eds., 1910, p. 399.) As Professor Dale Riepe says in his *Philosophy of India and its Impact on American Thought* (1970), Emerson found in Vedanta the answer to his quest for the absolute being as illustrated in *Chāndogya Upanishad*. (Dale Riepe, *Indian Philosophy and its Impact on American Thought*, 1970, p. 30.) Actually, Vedantic philosophy entered the American mind through what is known as the Transcendental Movement by Emerson and Thoreau,





who were called Boston Brahmins. Maurice Bloomfield (1885-1928), an American of Austrian origin, who was a Professor of Sanskrit at Johns Hopkins University, says in one of his papers, that in the 'Veda and the Upanishads we see the whole stuff of religion.' (Quoted in V. Raghavan, *Sanskrit and Allied Indological Studies in Europe*, 1956, p. 37.) There was a profound and pervasive Vedantic influence on the Transcendental Movement in America and it is shown in Arthur E. Christy's *The Orient in American Transcendentalism* (1932).

I think, I should here explain the expression 'that art Thou.' It is an Upanishadic saying and the words are spoken by Uddalaka Aruni to his son Svetaketu in *Chāndyoga Upanishad*. That here means Brahma, the supreme Reality and Thou is Uddalaka, his soul and what Uddalaka means to say is that Brahma is none other than the individual soul. This is the essence of Vedantic monism. The significance of the expression will be explained in the course of these lectures. This monistic doctrine of Vedanta appeared to the American Transcendentalists, particularly to Emerson and Thoreau. Since Josiah Royce and William James too greatly valued this idea they too are included in the group known as Transcendentalists. Our problem is that in the highroad of literary scholarship in the United States there is no reference to the influence of Indian thought on the American Transcendentalists. In Paul Elmer More's chapter on Emerson in the *Cambridge History of American Literature*, for example, Emerson's idealism is explained in terms of the ideas of Plato and Plotinus. Similarly, in the chapter on Thoreau there is no mention of his enthusiasm for Upanishadic philosophy. But how can the American literary historians and critics ignore the fact that Emerson wrote one whole poem entitled "Brahma"!

When we consider Vedantism in the American





Transcendental Movement we do not look for any Vedantic studies in the United States. For there is no account of such studies in that country before the nineties of the nineteenth century. But there is convincing evidence of Emerson and Thoreau's acquaintance with the *Bhagavadgītā* in their work. It is important for us to see that the *Bhagavadgītā* is considered as a Vedantic text by Swami Vivekananda although the Vedantic spirit of this great religious classic is not the spirit of Sankara's Vedanta, that is Advaita Vedanta. I am placing before you a very significant and immensely quotable statement of Thoreau on the *Bhagavadgītā*: 'Beside the vast and cosmological philosophy of the *Bhagavadgītā*, even our Shakespeare seems sometimes youthfully green and practical merely. Some of these sublime sentences still surviving after a thousand revolutions and translations, alone make us doubt if the poetic form and dress are not transitory, and not essential to the most effective and enduring expression of thought. 'Ex Oriente lux' may still be the motto of scholars, for the Western world has not yet derived from the East all the light that is destined to receive from thence.' (Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, 1849, p. 115.) The *Bhagavadgītā* which Emerson and Thoreau read was Charles Wilkins's English translation of it published in London in 1785. Wilkins belonged to the Asiatic Society founded in Calcutta in 1784. Sir William Jones's translation of the *Īśa Upanishad* published in 1799 was not so well-known in the United States. Thoreau's most powerful appreciation is to be found in his *Walden*: 'In the morning I bathe my intellect in the stupendous and cosmogonical philosophy of the *Bhagavad Gita*, since whose composition years of the gods have elapsed, and in comparison with which our modern world and its literature seem puny and trivial; and I doubt if that philosophy is not to be referred





to a previous state of existence, so remote is its sublimity from our conceptions. I lay down my book and go to my well for water, and there I meet the servant of the Brahmin, priest of Brahma, and Vishnu and Indra, who still sit in his temple on the Ganges reading the Vedas, or dwells at the root of a tree with his crust and water jug. I meet his servant come to draw water from his master, and our buckets as it were grate together in the same well. The pure Walden water is mingled with the sacred water of the Ganges.' (Thoreau, *Walden*, 1854, p. 197.)

Emerson also was acquainted with the *Upanishads* although it may not be possible to measure his knowledge of the subject. What we see in the monistic elements in his essays seems to be an inheritance from the Hellenic philosophy of Parmenides and Plato and from Plotinus. His poem on Brahma is obviously a Vedantic poem, but it is not specifically Upanishadic in its idiom.





## *Ramakrishna Movement and Vedanta in the West*

I may now turn to the Ramakrishna Movement and its contribution to Western understanding of Vedanta. How important is the role of the Ramakrishna Matha and Mission in the history of modern world's approach to Vedanta, we can see in the work of Carl T. Jackson, Professor of History and Dean of the College of Arts at the University of Texas, El Paso, whose work on the subject published by the Indiana University Press in 1994 is entitled *Vedanta for the West: The Ramakrishna Movement in the United States*. The Last sentence of this work is: 'As a pioneer in paving the way for introduction of Asian religious conceptions in the West, the Ramakrishna movement may be said to stand on the edge of one of the "megatrends" of modern world history.' (P. 145.)

There are two works published in the United States which are essential for a proper understanding of Western response to Vedanta and they are the products of those who are closely associated with the Ramakrishna Movement in the United States. The two works are *Vedanta for the Western World* published in 1945 by the Vedanta Society of Southern California (Viking Compass edition 1960). The other work published by the same Vedanta Society in the same year is *Vedanta for Modern Man*. Both are edited by Christopher Isherwood, an important figure in the Ramakrishna Movement in the United States. The two books together contain 897 pages covering masterly





articles written by Isherwood, Gerald Heard, Aldous Huxley, Swami Prabhavananda and others. I may draw your attention to a memorable statement of Isherwood in his introduction to *Vedanta for the Western World*: 'Ramakrishna is Vedanta's greatest human exemplar.' (P. 15.) These two works have done more for the emergence of a Western response to Vedanta than any other work I know, while it is true that Vedanta is yet to have its place in the philosophy courses in Western universities. I think Vedanta may not enter the high road of Western thought unless it is made a part of the academic work in the West.

I think, I should mention one work where you will get all that you need to know on this subject. That work is Swami Tathagatananda's *Journey of the Upanishads to the West* (The Vedanta Society of New York, 2002). How Vedanta is now a very important concern of the higher intelligence of the West, we can see the place which Aldous Huxley gives to it in his book *The Perennial Philosophy* (1944). The first chapter of this work is entitled 'That Art Thou' which is a translation of the Upanishadic saying *tat tvam asi*. Explaining this Huxley says, '... the *Atman*, or immanent eternal self, is one with Brahman, the Absolute Principle of all existence; and the last end of every human being is to discover the fact for himself, to find out who he really is.' (P. 2.) This is not easy to understand. The achievement of Swami Vivekananda is this that he learned the mystery of it from his master Ramakrishna and explained it to the world.

Romain Rolland's contribution to western understanding of Vedanta is what he presented in his two works, *The Life of Ramakrishna* (1929; E.F. Malcolm-Smith tr., 1930) and *The Life of Vivekananda and the Universal Gospel* (1930; E.F. Malcolm-Smith tr., 1931). The Vedanta which the West understood





and appreciated is the Vedanta as Ramakrishna and Vivekananda understood it and as Romain Rolland presents that Vedanta to the world. I have already told you that Christopher Isherwood called Ramakrishna 'Vedanta's greatest human exemplar'. Romain Rolland too realized the truth of the statement and he presented first Ramakrishna and then Vivekananda as an interpreter of that Vedanta. It was important to settle the real message of Vedanta and present it to the world. That message is to be found in the *Upanishads*, their interpretation in Badarayana's *Brahmasūtra* and the commentaries on that Vedantic text by the Acharyas from Sankara of the ninth century to Vallabha of the sixteenth. Add to this the *Bhagavadgītā* which is acknowledged as a Vedantic text by Sankara as also by Vivekananda. This is a vast literature and obviously it does not say the same thing although it is certainly true to the central message of the *Upanishads*. We know that while Sankara's Vedanta is Advaita Vedanta, Ramanuja's Vedanta is called Visishtadvaita Vedanta. And then we have Advaita Vedanta of Madhva, Dvaitadvaita Vedanta of Nimbarka and Vallabha's Suddhadvaita Vedanta. So there was the need for the formulation of a Vedanta presenting a consistent philosophy. Ramakrishna presented what we may call a unity of Vedantic thought. And his disciple Vivekananda understood this unity. The unified Vedanta philosophy is mentioned as Neo-Vedanta, a new Vedanta which is certainly rooted in the *Upanishads*.

But there are scholars and thinkers who have called Ramakrishna-Vivekananda's Vedanta Neo-Vedanta. In the second volume of his *Memoirs of My Life and Times* (1951; vol. I, 1932), Bipin Chandra Pal (1856-1932) speaks of Vivekananda's Neo-Vedantism. Horrwitch speaks of Vivekananda's Neo-Vedanta in an article published in *Prabuddha Bharata* in February





1936. And a very fine observation on Vivekananda's Neo-Vedanta is to be found in the eminent historian Ramesh Chandra Majumdar's article 'Acharya Vivekananda' included in *Chintanayak Vivekananda*, a large collection of essays published in 1977. A section of this volume is entitled 'Swamijir Navavedanta' where Professor Majumdar says: '*ei navavedanter mulrekhankan Sri Ramakrishna kariya giyachhilen; Swami Vivekananda tahake vishad yuktisahaye samriddha kariya krame krame ekti darsanic mate parinata kariyachhen.*' (The basic outline of this Neo-Vedanta was drawn by Sri Ramakrishna; Swami Vivekananda made it into a philosophy through lucid argument.) A more elaborated treatment of Vivekananda's Neo-Vedanta is Brahmachari Medhachaitanya's article 'Swami Vivekanander Navavedanta' included in the same volume.

Let us remember that although Vivekananda does not use the expression Neo-Vedanta, he did give a new name to his Vedanta philosophy when he gave four lectures on 'Practical Vedanta' in London in November 1896. (These lectures were delivered on 10, 12, 17 and 18 November; they are included in the first volume of his *Complete Works*. (Pp. 291-35.) Neither Ramakrishna nor Vivekananda rejects any school of Vedanta – *Dvaita*, *Visishtadvaita*, *Dvaitadvaita* and *Suddhadvaita*: they only affirm that they are all true. What brings Vedanta very close to the modern mind is that they do not call the world unreal and they do not insist that the aim of *sādhana* is the dissolution of the Individual in Brahma. Romain Rolland understood this.

Ramakrishna says a few things about Vedanta in *Rāmakṛṣṇ akathāmṛta* which show that he had a clear view of the different schools of Vedanta philosophy which emerged out of the various commentaries on Badarayana's *Brahmasūtra*, the *Upanishads* and the *Bhagavadgītā*. In the course





of a conversation that took place on 10 June 1883 and it is recorded in *Kathāmṛta*, Ramakrishna says: 'There are two schools of thought: the Vedanta and the Purana. According to Vedanta, this world is a framework of illusion, that is to say, it is all illusory, like a dream. But according to the Purana, the book of devotion, God himself has become the twenty-four cosmic principles. Worship God both within and without. As long as God keeps the awareness of 'I' in us, so long do sense-objects exist; and we cannot very well speak of the world as a dream. There is fire in the hearth; therefore the rice and pulse and potato and the other vegetables jump about in the pot. They jump about as if to say, 'We are here! We are jumping!' This body is the pot. The mind and intelligence are the water. The objects of the senses are the rice, potatoes and other vegetables. The 'I-consciousness' identified with the senses says, 'I am jumping about'. And *Satcidānanda* is the fire. Hence the bhakti scriptures describe this very world as a 'mansion of mirth'. Ramaprasad sang in one of his songs, 'This world is a framework of illusion.' Another devotee gave the reply, 'This very world is a mansion of mirth.' As the saying goes, the devotee of Kali, free while living, is full of Eternal Bliss. The Bhakta sees that He who is God has also become *Maya*. Again He himself has become the universe and all its living beings. The Bhakta sees God, *Maya*, the universe and the living beings as one.' Here Ramakrishna is a Vedantist and even an Advaita Vedantist, a monist. The only difference with Sankaracharya is that he rejects Sankara's idea of a world that is unreal. This is also the view of Sri Aurobindo who thinks that the doctrine of *Maya* destroys the philosophy of Advaita or Monism only because it contemplates something as eternal which is not *Brahma*. In a monistic universe there is nothing that can





be dismissed as junk. We then see that by rejecting Sankara's doctrine of Maya both Ramakrishna and Sri Aurobindo are saving Sankara's Advaita. As we read *Kathāmṛta*, we feel that Ramakrishna is a true Vedantist. In *Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings* (1898) Max Müller says: 'Vedanta philosophy is the very narrow running through all the bones of Ramakrishna's doctrine.'

Vivekananda gave the ideas of his master Ramakrishna the consistency of a discourse. He was an *Advaitavādin* but he had his reservations about the doctrine of Sankaracharya. In an address delivered at Lahore on 12 November 1897, Vivekananda said: 'Sankaracharya committed the mistake of supposing that the whole of the Vedanta taught one thing which was Advaita and nothing else; and wherever a passage bearing distinctly to Dvaita idea occurred he twisted and tortured the meaning to make it support his own theory.'

So after Ramakrishna a new Vedanta emerged and the Western response to Vedanta since then is a response to that Vedanta. Romain Rolland presented that Vedanta to the modern world.

The monks of the Ramakrishna Matha and Mission made a very large contribution to the Western understanding of Vedanta through lectures and publications. They established Vedanta Centres in the United States and seventeen of them are now active organizations in that country. There are now several Vedanta centres in Europe doing excellent work for the propagation of the philosophy of Vedanta and the teachings of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. Obviously this work was begun by Swami Vivekananda in 1893 and an account of that work is to be found in Marie Louise Burke's huge 6-volume work entitled *Vivekananda in the West*.

Let me now tell you something about Neo-Vedanta which





is the Vedanta to which the West responded. It is an expression which Vivekananda never uses as a description of his Vedanta philosophy. In 1963 there was held in Calcutta a Parliament of Religions to mark the birth centenary of Vivekananda and in its fifteen sessions many distinguished Indian philosophers spoke on Vivekananda's philosophy and none of them mentioned that philosophy as Neo-Vedanta. Even those who saw some new features in Vivekananda's Vedanta, features which distinguished his philosophy from what is called Vedanta did not use the concept Neo-Vedanta. There is a chapter on Vivekananda in V.S. Narvane's *Modern Indian Thought* (1984) and this work does not speak of Neo-Vedanta, nor is there any mention of Neo-Vedanta in Sivaramakrishna and Sumita Roy's *Perspectives on Ramakrishna-Vivekananda's Vedanta Tradition* (1991). I have handled some recent works on Vedanta and Vivekananda to see if any of the scholars have mentioned Vivekananda's philosophy as Neo-Vedanta. I discovered that even European scholars who were obviously acquainted with Neo-Platonism, Neo-Hegelianism and Neo-Kantism had not mentioned Vivekananda's philosophy as Neo-Vedanta. Amongst the contributors to the work *Swami Vivekananda and the Modernization of Hinduism* (1998) edited by William Radice, there are some European scholars who could have shown a form of new Vedanta as the essence of new Hinduism, but in none of their papers do I find the expression Vedantism. The word is not used in any of the articles included in the work *Living Wisdom: Vedanta in the West* (1994) edited by Pravrajika Vrajaprana. I thought Carl T. Jackson would not be able to explain the central doctrine of Vedanta to the Western reader without a presentation of Neo-Vedanta. But there is no mention of it in his *Vedanta for the West* published in 1994. Actually Neo-Vedanta had





emerged as a modern philosophy of Vedanta when Christopher Isherwood edited his two volumes, *Vedanta for the Western World* (1945) and *Vedanta for Modern Man* (1945). But in these two works there is no mention of Neo-Vedanta.

I think, the expression Neo-Vedanta should be used to affirm that Vedanta is an evolving philosophy and that it has a consistency and a unity which we miss in the old Vedantic literature. Even in Badarayana's *Brahmasūtra* which was produced as a distillation of Vedanta philosophy has been interpreted as both a dualist and monistic philosophy. Then the commentaries on this basic Vedantic texts created different schools of Vedanta: *Advaita*, *Dvaita*, *Visishtadvaita*, *Dvaitadvaita*, *Suddhadvaita* etc. Romain Rolland mentions Ramakrishna's Vedanta as '... a consumption of the spiritual life of three hundred million people'. That consummation created Neo-Vedanta.

Actually Vivekananda did not do anything very strange in presenting a new view of Vedanta nor did Ramakrishna totally estrange himself from the old perspective of Vedanta philosophy. What both of them wanted to say about the message of Vedanta was consistent with the traditional approach to our philosophy. Throughout history there has been a tendency to achieve a synthesis of varying ideas of our Vedantists. Our *Rgveda*, the earliest religious work in India or the world is polytheistic in its hymns to our gods and goddesses. But even in this work there is a clear anticipation of the Upanishadic idea of the One. We have an affirmation of monotheism in *Rk* 46 of Sūkta 164 of the tenth *Maṇḍala* of the *Rgveda*: '*ekam sadvipra bahudhā vadanti*'. (The Real is one, the learned call it by different names.) In his introduction to a selection of *Rgvedic* hymns A.A. Macdonell says: '... abstract deities represent the supreme god that was evolved at the end of





the Rigvedic period.' (A.A. Macdonell, *A History of Sanskrit Literature*, 1900, p. 13.) Even today a Hindu worshipping several deities believe in the oneness of God. The Bengali poet Satyen Datta (1882-1922) says in his poem 'Varanasi' included in his *Kuhu o Kekā* (1912):

*agnihotri milechhe hethay Brahmavider sathe  
veder jyotsna-nisi mise gechhe upanishader prate.*

(The fire-worshipper has united himself with the believer in Brahma: the moonlit night of the Veda has here dawned in the sunlight of the *Upanishad*.)

Ramanuja (1027-1137) believed in a Personal God and called his philosophy a form of *Advaitavad*. In Bengal the great Vedantist Madhusudan Saraswati (1540-1623) was an *Advaitavādin* and his work *Advaitasiddhi* is a classic of Advaita literature. But he worshipped a Personal God. Surendranath Dasgupta says about him in the second volume of his *A History of Indian Philosophy* (1932): 'It is interesting to see that though he was such a confirmed monist in his philosophy, he followed the path of *bhakti* or devotion, as is evidenced by his numerous works promulgating the *bhakti* creed.' (P. 226.) Even Sankaracharya (788-830), the great philosopher of Advaita wrote beautiful hymns to our gods and goddesses which are included in his two works, 'Ānandalaharī' and 'Saundarya-laharī'.

Following the teachings of his Master Ramakrishna, Vivekananda only gave a final touch to this process of synthesis to present a harmony of ideas in Indian philosophy. You can now see why I have chosen to speak on Vivekananda's Neo-Vedanta. I have done so because as a great Vedantist philosopher Vivekananda raised a new voice to represent a new spirit and this distinguishes his ideas from those of the classical Vedanta. In classical Vedanta we have several





schools of thought each differing from the other. In Vivekananda we have a single consistent Vedanta. Vivekananda thought that even the *Upanishads*, the basic texts of Vedanta philosophy speak in many voices. Vivekananda saw a lack of coherence in the *Upanishads*. And this is natural when the *Upanishads* were written by many sages belonging to a long period. In his address 'Thoughts on the Gita' included in the fourth volume of his *Complete Works*, he says: 'If we study the *Upanishads* we notice, in wandering through the mazes of many irrelevant subjects, the sudden introduction of a great truth, just as in the midst of a huge wilderness a traveller unexpectedly comes across here and there an exquisitely beautiful rose, with its leaves, thorns, roots all entangled.' (*Complete Works*, iv, p. 106.) This alone shows that Vivekananda thought that there was scope for a reconstruction of Upanishadic philosophy. Then comes the question of synthesizing the different schools of Vedanta philosophy: *Advaita*, *Dvaita*, *Visishtadvaita*, *Dvaitadvaita*, *Suddhadvaita* etc. Vivekananda was personally a supporter of Advaita but he nevertheless said that all these systems were valid and were a presentation of Vedanta philosophy. He believed in what the American philosopher William James called 'varieties of religious experience' in his book bearing that name published in 1902. The truth of religion is the truth of experience. This is the foundation of Ramakrishna's dictum that all religions are true. Vivekananda explains it.

Vivekananda believed in the reconstruction of Vedanta philosophy because he thought that revelation was a continuous process. In his address 'The Way to the Realization of a Universal Religion', he says, 'I accept all religions that were in the past. ... I shall keep my heart open for all that may come in the future. Is God's book finished? Or is it still





a continuous revelation going on?' (*Complete Works*, i, p. 374.) So when we speak of a 'Western Response to Vedanta' we do not mean a particular school of Vedanta but the Vedanta which emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century. When Gerald Heard speaks of Vedanta he says: 'Here then and here alone, lies the hope, not of personal salvation, but of a new and balanced philosophy and praxis which could provide sane and progressive living for a unified mankind.' Vivekananda's Neo-Vedanta is this new philosophy. And it is this philosophy of Vedanta which appealed to the West. Romain Rolland says about Vivekananda's work in America that 'He undertook a series of apostolic campaigns over this immense spiritual stretch of fallow land the Vedantic seed and watering it with Ramakrishna's rain of love.' (*The Life of Vivekananda*, p. 74.)





## *Swami Vivekananda and Vedanta in the West*

Swami Vivekananda made a very large contribution to Western understanding of Vedanta. It is however true that the interest he created in our *Upanishads* in America and England did not lead to the setting up of faculties for Indian philosophy in Western universities; it is no less true that this philosophy could never become a part of Western intellectual life in the absence of such faculties. Why this is so, I have tried to explain at the beginning of the lecture. Let us realize that Western response to Oriental civilization is extremely limited. Arnold Toynbee has regretted the intellectual provinciality of the West when he says that while the East has made the past of the West a part of its own past, the West is yet to make the past of the East a part of its past. World unity on the intellectual plain is yet to be achieved. About a century and a quarter ago Max Müller wrote one large work entitled *India: What Can It Teach Us?* The book consists of a series of lectures delivered at the University of Cambridge delivered in 1882. I was a student in an old British University where there was a Boden Professor of Sanskrit. He was interested in grammar and philosophy and was least concerned with our ancient philosophy. I discovered that at the lectures of R.C. Zaehner, Spalding Professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics, the audience was exceedingly small. Obviously such poor attendance was due to the fact





that the subject of which he was a professor was not the subject of any faculty of that University. Indian philosophy can never be popular in the West unless it is taught through university faculties. I have already said in these lectures that in the West philosophy is dead and there can be a philosophical renaissance in Europe and America only when Western universities turn their attention to Indian philosophy.

It must however be admitted that Vivekananda's lectures in the United States and in England in the years between 1893 and 1897 created an enthusiasm for our philosophy in the West. An example of this is Romain Rolland's two books on Ramakrishna and Vivekananda. Carl T. Jackson, Professor of History at the University of Texas, has written a book entitled *Vedanta for the West: The Ramakrishna Movement in the United States* published in 1994. The two pictures on its cover are those of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda. Actually the Vedanta of today is the Vedanta as explained by Ramakrishna and his disciple, Vivekananda. This is important for the Advaita Vedanta of Sankaracharya as it was presented to the West was believed to be the only Vedanta so far. In the severe monism or Advaita of Sankara the world is unreal and Brahman alone is true. This has made the West averse to our philosophy. Concentration on this idea of Vedanta has led to a gross misunderstanding of Vedanta in the West. An instance of this is a statement of Albert Schweitzer's in his *Indian Thought and its Development* (1935; Mrs. C.E.E. Russell tr., 1936). Schweitzer says in this work: 'In Indian thought world and life negation occupies a predominant position.' (P. 3.) Ramakrishna and Vivekananda's Vedanta is a world-affirming and life-affirming philosophy. Vivekananda's Vedanta is not exclusively Sankara's Advaita Vedanta which dismisses the world as unreal. The Vedanta which he presents in his four lectures on 'Practical Vedanta'





is not at all a world-negating philosophy. We call Vivekananda's Vedanta, Neo-Vedanta – a comprehensive view of Vedanta which reconciles Advaita Vedanta to Dvaita Vedanta. Our Asiatic Society has published its Indira Gandhi Memorial lectures for 1998 in a small book called *Swami Vivekananda's Neo-Vedanta*. You may read it for an understanding of Vivekananda's Vedanta philosophy.

The Vedanta which Vivekananda preached in the United States is not really the Advaita Vedanta of Sankara according to which the goal of *Sādhana* is to be merged in Brahman which is the only reality; the world as we know it being unreal. In the first of his six surviving lectures at the Parliament of Religions delivered at its inauguration on 11 September 1893, Vivekananda said, 'We believe not only in toleration, but we accept all religions as true.' In his second brief address he said that this Parliament was a '... great attempt to break down the barriers of this little world of ours.' The third address given on 19 September was a lecture on Hinduism which he called 'Vedantism'. While the address is a statement of the Upanishadic doctrine of *tat tvam asi* (That art thou) it does not speak of any dissolution of the individual soul in Brahma. All that he says is that '... when a soul becomes one with Brahman, it would only realize the Lord as the perfection'.

So when after attaining Brahman it realizes perfection, the soul remains, 'not resolved'. The fourth address which is very brief is a brave but noble criticism of Christian missionary activity in India. The fifth address is on Buddhism which he said was the fulfilment of Hinduism. He said that 'Hinduism cannot live without Buddhism, nor Buddhism without Hinduism.' At the end of the address he said: 'Let us then join the wonderful intellect of the Brahmin with the heart, the noble soul, the wonderful humanizing power of Buddha.' At the final session of the Parliament, Vivekananda made a plea for a spirit





of universality in religion. When the world embraces a universal religion, the Christian is '... not to become a Hindu or a Buddhist, nor a Hindu or a Buddhist to become a Christian. But each must assimilate the spirit of the other and yet preserve his individuality and grow according to his own law of growth. Upon the banner of every religion will soon be written – "Help and not fight, assimilation and not destruction, Harmony and peace and not dissension."'

What is striking in these addresses of a Vedantist is that he is not speaking of any doctrine as the only doctrine that is true. He is not exalting a particular prophet as the only true seer and is not stressing on a particular liturgy. On the contrary, he is affirming that every religion is still a growing institution. I think, his broad liberal outlook on our spiritual life is rooted in his Vedantism which believes in the One manifesting itself in the Many. Vivekananda is a universalist because he is a Vedantist. 'Is God's book finished?', he asked and it is a question which nobody had asked before. 'The *Bible*, the *Vedas*, The *Koran*, and all other sacred books are there, but so many pages remain yet to be unfolded.' Vivekananda's Vedantic message to the West is a prophylactic against the fundamentalism which is now creeping into our religion.

Let us now consider Vivekananda's addresses on Vedanta philosophy given in the USA and in England. I think, the most important of such addresses is the one on 'The Vedanta Philosophy' given at the Harvard Graduate Philosophical Society on 25 March 1896. It was published as a pamphlet with an introduction by C.C. Everett and a copy of it may still be found in the library of Harvard University. In this address Vivekananda affirms the importance of Badaranayana's *Brahmasūtra* as the basic philosophical text of Vedanta philosophy. Let me here make a very important statement about *Brahmasūtra*. It is said that this authoritative Vedantic





text presents Vedanta as a Dvaita philosophy. Let us see that Swami Vivekananda, although an Advaita Vedantist did not preach in the West a Vedanta philosophy according to which the world was unreal. Also he never said that the ultimate goal of a Vedantic *sādhaka* is the dissolution of the individual soul in Brahman. But we must not imagine that was truant from his Vedantism while so treating Vedanta in his addresses in the West. He never said that Sankara's Advaita Vedanta was the only Vedanta and he never thought that there was a conflict between Advaita Vedanta and Dvaita Vedanta. He derived his idea of reconciliability of Advaita and Dvaita from his Master Sri Ramakrishna. Let me place before you some of the important observations of Vivekananda to show that by Vedanta Vivekananda did not mean Advaita Vedanta only. 'Of late', Vivekananda says, 'it has become the custom of most people to identify the word Vedanta with the Advaita system of Vedanta philosophy.' (*Complete Works*, iii, p. 228.) In the same context, Vivekananda says that the 'Visishta claims as much authority for the Vedanta as the Advaitists. So do the dualistic, so does every other sect in India.' (*Ibid.*, iii, p. 229.) In the same address he says, 'The word Vedanta must cover the whole ground of and being part of the Vedas.' (*Ibid.*, iii, p. 230.) In the same volume of his complete works we read: 'Unfortunately there is the mistaken notion in modern India that the word Vedanta has reference only to the Advaita system.' (*Ibid.*, iii, p. 395.) Vivekananda always affirmed that '... it would be wrong to confine Vedanta only to one system which has arisen out of the Upanishads. All these are covered by the word Vedanta.' (*Ibid.*, iii, p. 396.)

I am dealing with Swami Vivekananda in my lectures on Vedanta in the West because he cast a profound influence on those thinkers of the West who responded to Vedanta





philosophy in the nineteenth century and most important of them is Max Müller. Vivekananda met Max Müller at his residence at Oxford in 1896. In his *Ramakrishna: His Life and Sayings*, he acknowledges his debt to Vivekananda for information about his subject. Since I have already dealt with Max Müller's understanding of Vedanta, I am not going into details of this subject. Romain Rolland too deals with Vedanta in his biographies of Ramakrishna and Vivekananda and he too was enlightened by Vivekananda in his approach to the subject. Modern Western comprehensive view of Vedanta is due to Vivekananda's liberal interpretation of the philosophy.

If you are interested in the work of Vivekananda as a preacher of Vedanta in the West, you can read Marie Louise Burke's *Vivekananda in the West*. Carl T. Jackson's *Vedanta for the West*, too writes in some detail on the effect of Vivekananda's work on the Western approach to Vedanta. Professor Jackson says in this work that 'Hinduism as a live religion in the West begins with Vivekananda.' (Carl T. Jackson, *Vedanta for the West*, 1994, p. 143.) Any work on Hinduism published in Europe or America in the twentieth century would mention Vivekananda as an important source of information on the subject. Even Indian scholars are yet to realize the contribution of Vivekananda to Western understanding of our civilization, religion and philosophy. It is true that Vedanta is yet to establish itself in the West as an important subject of study in its universities and I have told you why it is so; it is Vivekananda who turned the attention of the higher intelligence of the West to our philosophy. But we must continue our efforts to bring a change in this situation not out of any intellectual patriotism but for the renewal of genuine philosophical studies in the world as a whole.